

Substance use challenges can affect anyone—regardless of age, background, or life experience. They may arise gradually or in response to stress, trauma, or major life changes, and they often overlap with mental health concerns. The important truth is this: help is available, recovery is possible, and no one has to face the journey alone.

Seeking support before a crisis occurs can make the process easier, less overwhelming, and more empowering. Many people choose to begin treatment on their own terms, taking proactive steps toward healthier and more stable lives.

A Community-Based Approach to Recovery

Recovery is not a solo effort. It is most effective when supported by a community that includes trained professionals, family members, peers, and trusted organizations. Today's substance use treatment services are designed to be collaborative and compassionate, recognizing the whole person—not just the behavior.

Modern programs are grounded in **trauma-informed care**, which acknowledges that substance use is not a moral failing or simple choice. For many, it can be a response to unresolved trauma, chronic stress, or difficult life circumstances. Treatment approaches meet individuals where they are, offering support without judgment and honoring personal goals.

Recovery Is Not One-Size-Fits-All

There is no single definition of recovery. For some people, recovery means complete abstinence. For others, it may involve reducing use, adopting safer coping strategies, or stabilizing other areas of life such as housing, employment, or mental health. Every positive step forward matters, and progress—no matter how small—can be life-changing.

Treatment plans are often personalized and may evolve over time. What matters most is that individuals are supported in making choices that improve their well-being and align with their values.

A Wide Range of Support Services

Social service agencies and treatment providers offer comprehensive, stigma-free care for both youth and adults. These services may include:

- Substance use and mental health treatment
- Gambling counseling
- Harm reduction services
- Diversion and early-intervention programs

- Peer recovery support
- Prevention and education programs
- Family education and counseling
- Care coordination across systems
- Recovery housing and supportive living options

Together, these services address not only substance use, but the broader factors that influence long-term stability and health.

Accessible Care Through Telehealth

Telehealth has expanded access to treatment by offering the same quality of therapy as in-person visits, with greater flexibility. By removing barriers such as transportation, scheduling conflicts, and geographic distance, telehealth allows more people to engage in consistent care from the comfort of their own homes.

Lifesaving Tools and Harm Reduction

Harm reduction strategies play a critical role in keeping individuals and communities safe. Tools like **Narcan (naloxone)** are proven to reverse opioid overdoses, are safe and easy to use, and are widely available. Training is often offered to individuals, families, and community members so they can respond quickly and effectively in an emergency.

Building a Foundation for the Future

Many substance use treatment programs are guided by the principles outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): **Community, Home, Health, and Purpose**. These pillars emphasize connection, stability, wellness, and meaningful engagement—helping individuals and families work toward their own goals and rebuild their futures.

Recovery is rarely a straight line. There are highs and lows, progress and setbacks. But with the right support, recovery is always worth pursuing—and help is available at every stage of the journey.

Nicasa: Empowering Individuals with Support for Substance Use and Recovery

Nicasa Behavioral Health Services is one of the Vernon Township Community Mental Health Board (VTCMHB) grant recipients. Nonprofit organizations that provide services

for mental health, substance abuse or development/intellectual disabilities may be eligible for future grants. Learn more at vtcmhb.org.

Sixty years ago, Nicasa Behavioral Health Services started out as a one-person agency offering support to participants of Alcoholics Anonymous – and has grown into a comprehensive continuum of care for substance use, mental health and problem gambling treatment. Prevention and in-school programs, deflection and harm reduction initiatives, care coordination and much more are also offered – all of which provide life-saving behavioral healthcare and social services to individuals, as well as their families.

At the heart of Nicasa’s mission is a simple belief: lives can be transformed, one person at a time. This mission is carried out through community partnerships, relationship-building, premier-quality care, and peer-led recovery support that help individuals overcome challenges and reach their fullest potential.

Substance Use Treatment Saves Lives

Substance use remains a serious concern in Lake County. In 2024, there were 118 fatal overdoses, including four in Vernon Township. These numbers don’t capture the people grieving these losses or those still struggling who are not receiving help. For many, substance misuse is one of several complex challenges. Nicasa provides treatment and wrap-around support so individuals can address external barriers and focus on recovery.

“If someone passes away from a fatal overdose or completes a suicide attempt, that is one too many,” said Nicasa Chief Executive Officer Bruce N. Johnson. “When we meet clients where they are, listen, and help them define their own recovery goals, we can keep them alive and moving toward long-term recovery.”

It Takes a Community to Recover

In 2025, a grant from the Vernon Township Community Mental Health Board expanded Nicasa’s substance use treatment services to include in-person and telehealth counseling, resource connections, and support from peer recovery specialists who draw from their own experiences to help clients navigate a complex system of care. By addressing needs holistically, Nicasa helps individuals stabilize, strengthen relationships, and reconnect with their communities.

Meeting a Growing Need

The demand for services has surged since the pandemic, as individuals seeking help have more complex needs and limited access to affordable care. With nearly 80% of clients uninsured or on Medicaid, fundraising efforts are critical to help cover the cost of treatment – so no one in need is turned away.

Building a Brighter Future

Nicasa thrives through collaboration with families, providers, volunteers, partners and donors – to ensure all community members can access life-saving behavioral health and social services.

For information on volunteering or registering for programs, visit nicasa.org, call 847-546-6450 or email info@nicasa.org.